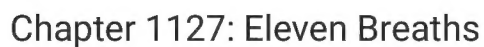


C1127: Eleven Breaths



"I see!"

Upon learning that the other party was the famed genius of the Martial Arts Division, a figure who stood toe-to-toe with Shi Hao, Division Head Wei nodded before turning to Zhang Xuan. "Sun shi, let me get another battle technique for you. Mastering the Grand Constellation Finger won't be easy. Even among the two hundred battle techniques listed on the wall, it's considered one of the harder ones."

Considering that Division Head Feng was not a combat master and didn't receive the systematic training that they underwent before, it was not surprising that he had taken two decades to achieve Minor Accomplishment in the technique. However, Jiao Tan was the most talented individual of the Martial Arts Division of the current generation, and yet, he had still taken seven years to reach Minor Accomplishment. It was no wonder the Grand Constellation Finger was famed as one of the hardest battle techniques to master in the Martial Arts Division!

Zhang Xuan shook his head as he casually took the manual of the Grand Constellation Finger from Jiao Tan's hands and flipped through it. "There's no need to go through so much trouble; I'll just practice this one."

To him, as long as he could compile a Heaven's Path battle technique, it mattered not which of the two hundred battle techniques he practiced.

Knowing that he would draw hostility from the other party if he attempted to dissuade him too much, Division Head Wei conceded. "Alright then. If you wish to give up at any point in time, feel free to tell me. I'll bring you another battle technique."

Often, a cultivator had to try practicing the battle technique themselves before they would truly understand how difficult it was.

Once the other party stumbled on the technique, failing to even achieve Novice mastery quickly, he would finally understand how difficult the Grand Constellation Finger was.

Clearly, Jiao Tan also harbored the same thoughts in mind. He stared at the conceited young man before him intently, waiting to see the look of desperation on the other party's face once he realized that he could not comprehend the content of the manual.

However, his expectations did not come to be. Instead of desperation, he found himself looking at a face frowning in disgust.

"What do you mean by that?" Jiao Tan questioned in displeasure.

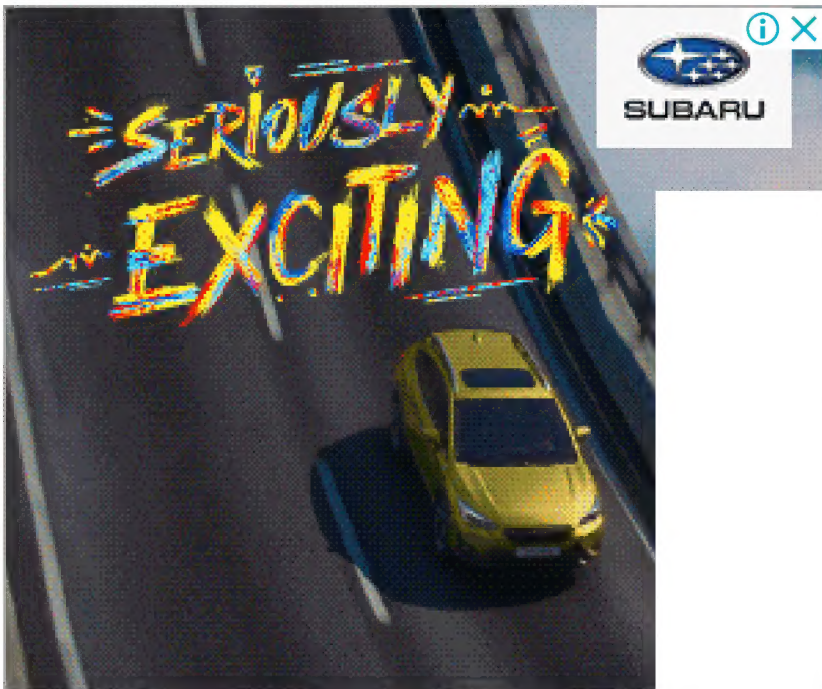
It was one thing for the other party to be unable to comprehend the manual, but what was with the look of disgust on his face? It was as if the other party thought that he was too good for their battle technique!

Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before replying, "It's nothing!"

After which, he turned his attention back to the manual in his hands, and a moment later, he sighed deeply and said, "Forget it. I guess there's no choice!"

With a look of resignation reminiscent of one who was ready to face death, Zhang Xuan closed his eyes.

"You..." Seeing how the other party's expression grew even more exaggerated than before, Jiao Tan felt so wrathful that he could have blown up on the spot.



The Grand Constellation Finger might not be a top-notch battle technique, but it was at least one of the stronger techniques in the Martial Arts Division. Normal cultivators would find it profound and difficult to cultivate, but they would still be honored to learn it. Yet... this fellow had a look of complete repulsion on his face, as if a fly had entered his mouth. That was really a little too much!

Jiao Tan harrumphed coldly. "What's with your poor attitude? Even if you can't comprehend the intricacies of the Grand Constellation Finger, surely you need not act in such a disrespectful manner..."

But before he could finish his words, a powerful aura carrying an air of antiquity and vastness suddenly burst forth from the young man before him. Following which, the young man suddenly raised his right hand and tapped at the space before him with his forefinger.

Tz la!

A burst of zhenqi tore across air, creating a deafening, piercing sound reminiscent of a piece of paper being torn into two. One could vaguely see stars rotating around the young man's fingertip, as if he had the world in his hands.

The Grand Constellation Finger was a technique created by an elder of the Combat Master Hall more than ten thousand years ago. That elder had carefully observed the movements of celestial bodies, and emulating the positioning of the stars with his zhenqi, he had created this finger art.

This technique was feared not only for its powerful physical might. The finger art carried the vastness of the universe within it as well, and those facing it would feel as if they were traversing through boundless space, exerting great pressure on their souls. As such, it was extremely difficult to guard against this attack.

However, it was also for the same reason that it was extremely difficult for ordinary cultivators to comprehend. There were even some who had dedicated their entire lives to it, only to remain oblivious to the power of the stars on their deathbed.

Jiao Tan's initial intention of offering the Grand Constellation Finger to Sun shi was because he could not stand the other party's arrogance and wanted to teach him some humility. However, upon seeing the burst of zhenqi from the other party's finger, his eyes narrowed, and his body trembled. "This is... Novice?"

He had thought that the other party was just putting on an act in order to spare himself from the embarrassment of being unable to comprehend the battle technique, and yet, just after shutting his eyes for an instant, he had actually managed to achieve Novice mastery!

One must know that even Jiao Tan himself had taken an entire year to reach Novice mastery!

Tzzzzzzzz!

While Jiao Tan was astonished beyond measure, the zhenqi gathering on the young man's finger was swiftly growing stronger and stronger, to the point where a deep rumbling sound could be heard from the sheer accumulation of power. In that instant, Jiao Tan felt as if the entire room had turned dark, and the stars around him threatened to fall upon him.

"This is... Initiate?" Jiao Tan gulped down a mouthful saliva as his face turned completely pale.

The biggest hurdle in the Grand Constellation Finger lay in the initial phase, where one had to comprehend the power of the stars in order to draw upon the might of the technique. Once one overcame this challenge, the subsequent cultivation of the technique would be a little easier and faster. But even so, it was not supposed to be so fast!

How long did the other party take?

Ten breaths?

Five breaths?

Or only two breaths?

A tap of his finger, and the other party was already at Initiate. Before he could even begin to process what was going on, the other party was already at Initiate...

Is this even humanly possible?

Jiao Tan's felt his throat turn dry. He quickly turned his gaze to ask Division Head Wei just what kind of background the young man came from to be able to grasp the Grand Constellation Finger so easily, only to see Division Head Wei staring at the young man with bulging eyes as well.

Clearly, Division Head Wei had not expected the young man to be able to advance from Novice to Initiate that quickly either.

After all, this was something that defied common sense.

"Division Head Wei..." Fearing that he would interrupt the cultivating Sun shi, Jiao Tan opted to send a telepathic message over instead.

"Hmm?" Division Head Wei was jolted out of his shock.

"Has Sun shi... really not practiced the Grand Constellation Finger in the past?" Jiao Tan asked doubtfully.

Recalling the various incredible deeds the young man had achieved earlier, Division Head Wei contemplated for a moment before replying. "That should be the case. There's no need for someone of his caliber to lie about something as minor as this!"

A collaboration between the hall master and two division heads, and Sun shi was still able to escape unscathed. Not only so, he even managed to find an opportunity to tap into the formation of the Heart Division to subdue them. And just earlier, he had destroyed all ten stone walls in the Trial of Inner Breath with a single palm strike.

Surely a person of such great capability would not need to lie just to inflate his ego. It was more likely that the Grand Constellation Finger was simply easy to him.

"If he has not practiced the Grand Constellation Finger before and really managed to reach Initiate within just a few breaths... won't he catch up to my seven years of effort and reach Minor Accomplishment in just a single day?" Jiao Tan uttered with widened eyes as his lips quivered in horror.

"Surely not. There's a huge rift between Initiate and Minor Accomplishment, so it shouldn't be possible for anyone to do it so quickly... Ah?"

Halfway through his words, Division Head Wei abruptly exclaimed in shock.

At this point, the young man had straightened his arm, and a vortex reminiscent of a revolving stellar river appeared at his fingertip. Just looking at that incredible mass of power rotating on the fingertip could easily leave one light-headed.

"Minor Accomplishment..."

The duo fearfully took two steps back.

It was just a moment ago that Division Head Wei had said that the other party would not reach Minor Accomplishment that day, but the next moment, he was forced to swallow

his words.

Hu!

Upon achieving Minor Accomplishment, Zhang Xuan opened his eyes. He looked at the vortex of power gathered on his fingertip and sighed deeply before turning his gaze toward Jiao Tan.

"Does the Trial of Martial Arts only open to those who have achieved Major Accomplishment in their battle technique?"

Jiao Tan was not too sure why the other party was asking such a question, but he swiftly nodded in response. "That's right..."

Only one who had achieved Major Accomplishment in any of the two hundred battle techniques would stand a chance in the Trial of Martial Arts. Over time, this had become the prerequisite to challenging the trial.

Jiao Tan was just about to explain this matter to the young man when the latter sighed deeply and said, "I see..."

Following which, the young man closed his eyes once more.

"What?" Jiao Tan's cheeks twitched. "You aren't thinking of... pushing for a breakthrough to Major Accomplishment right now, are you? The Grand Constellation Finger is highly demanding on zhenqi, and a forceful breakthrough without prior preparation could easily result in severe internal injuries."

Once again, before Jiao Tan could finish his words, the young man raised his finger and tapped on the space before him once more.

Huala!

The air in the area was suddenly compressed tightly together. All of a sudden, Jiao Tan felt as if he was standing in the middle of the universe with innumerable stars around him. Each and every one of the stars was flying toward him with incredible momentum, threatening to crush his body into smithereens.

"Domain of Stars..." Jiao Tan's body trembled intensely. "This is... the level of mastery exceeding Major Accomplishment, Consummation?"

The mastery of a battle technique could be divided into five levels: Novice, Initiate, Minor Accomplishment, Major Accomplishment, and Consummation.

It was just a moment ago that he had said that reaching Major Accomplishment would be nigh impossible, and the following moment, the other party managed to reach Consummation with such ease.

It seemed like from the moment he came into contact with the manual till he cultivated to Consummation, all in all... only a dozen or so seconds had passed!

And he, the most talented individual of the Martial Arts Division, had spent seven years only to reach Minor Accomplishment.

An overwhelming sense of defeat left him feeling as if he would explode on the spot.

There would be no damage if there was not any comparison.

Not knowing that his short moment of cultivation had scared Division Head Wei and Jiao Tan to the point that they were going to spew blood at any moment, Zhang Xuan opened his eyes.

Truthfully, if it was not for the collection of books within, he would never have lowered himself to cultivating the Grand Constellation Finger.

Even after compiling it with the finger arts in his Library of Heaven's Path, there were still five flaws in it!

He had never thought that he would cultivate such a flawed battle technique in his life. It was for this reason that he had such a conflicted expression on his face.

It was simply too hard to swallow this finger art!

This must surely be the darkest stain in his history of cultivation!

However, it could not be helped. He had to clear the Trial of Martial Arts to find more Saint 2-dan cultivation techniques in order to achieve a breakthrough. Otherwise, who knew how much longer it would take him?

It was fortunate that none of these flaws demanded a catalyst for him to cultivate the battle technique, or else he would have been in deep trouble.

Shaking away the frustrations in his mind, Zhang Xuan said, "I'm done. Combat Master Jiao Tan, I will have to trouble you to register me for the Trial of Martial Arts."

Most of the flaws were regarding the tearing the cultivator's meridians upon the execution of the technique, putting the cultivator in excruciating pain. However, with Zhang Xuan's Heaven's Path zhenqi, he could heal those tears swiftly, so it did not pose a problem.

In any case, he only required it to clear the trial. At most, he would just avoid using it in the future.

"Y-yes!" Jiao Tan finally recovered from his shock. Cowering back slightly, he quickly left the area. Not too long later, he returned. "Sun shi, I have negotiated with the combat masters in charge and gotten you the next slot for the trial!"

A large crowd would challenge the Trial of Martial Arts each day, but the number that would eventually pass the trial was very low.

Considering that the young man had been brought over by Division Head Wei himself, and he had already achieved the level of Consummation for the Grand Constellation Finger, it was not anything much to let him go first for the trial.

"Thank you for your help." Zhang Xuan clasped his fist in gratitude before following Jiao Tan forward.

The door to the trial happened to open at this moment, and a young man walked out with a gloomy expression on his face. With just a look, it was obvious that he had failed the examination.

"Sun shi, this way." Jiao Tan gestured into the opened doorway.

Zhang Xuan walked in, and in the blink of an eye, he had already disappeared from everyone's sight.

"Jiao Tan, just what is that fellow's background that you would intervene in his stead to give him priority in the queue?"

"I don't know either..." Jiao Tan shook his head.

"You don't know? Then, surely you do know what battle technique he is going to be challenging, right?" the combat master asked again.

Based on the reported battle technique, it was possible to deduce the other party's background.

"He's challenging the Grand Constellation Finger!" Jiao Tan said.

"Grand Constellation Finger? Isn't that the battle technique you are cultivating at the moment?"

"I heard that that battle technique is incredibly difficult to master. Even someone as talented as you took seven years in order to reach Minor Accomplishment! For that fellow to dare challenge that battle technique, has he already achieved Major Accomplishment in it? But judging from his appearance, he doesn't look old enough."

The combat master from before frowned. "Given his young age, how long could he possibly have cultivated the technique?"

"Probably..." It was intended as a hypothetical question, but Jiao Tan happened to have the answer to it. With a bitter smile, he said, "Twelve breaths. Ah, no, it should be eleven breaths!"

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